

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### ISRAEL TO GET AMERICAN BUFFALO

The Biblical home of Goliath will soon receive two more mighty creatures, American buffalo, a gift from the city of Buffalo, New York, to its sister city, Kiryat Gat, in southwest Israel.

The buffalo, the first in the Middle East, will be housed in the National Biblical Zoo in Jerusalem where special facilities have been constructed for their display and eventual breeding. The animals were donated to Buffalo by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in Nebraska where a representative herd is maintained.

The gift was the idea of Joselyn J. Berg, chairman of the Buffalo-Kiryat Gat Sister City Foundation. "The sister city program is based on learning each other's culture and on developing friendship," Berg said. "So it was a natural gift. The buffalo is not only our city's namesake and emblem, it is a rich part of our country's heritage. And the zoo in Jerusalem was anxious to receive its first representative animal from North America." The buffalo, more correctly known as American bison, is also the symbol of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Buffalo, New York, and Kiryat Gat became sister cities in 1974 through the auspices of Sister Cities International, a nonprofit organization which links over 650 cities in 70 countries around the world. The program involves the affiliation of a community and its citizens in the United States

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with counterparts in other nations for the purpose of educational, cultural, professional, and technical exchange. The International Communication Agency is also assisting with transfer of the buffalo.

Kiryat Gat is a very successful 25-year-old planned city that is the gateway to the Negev Desert. The rapidly growing city, with a population of 29,000, was established to accept new immigrants to Israel and today boasts 32 nationalities among its residents. The general area was the focal point of many historical incidents including the battles of Joshua, of David against Goliath, and of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon against Lachish.

The buffalo which are being sent to Israel were calved in the spring of 1977. Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge maintains a herd of 225 buffalo and each year must dispose of surplus animals. Both animals now weigh about 600 pounds. The bull will eventually surpass 2,000 pounds and the female may weigh more than 1,000.

Buffalo are extremely strong, unpredictable, and sometimes dangerous animals. Once estimated to number more than 60 million in North America, the wild U.S. buffalo population was down to only 500 animals by 1880. Westward expansion of the Nation and an almost systematic destruction of the species by commercial hunters nearly exterminated the species altogether. However, early conservationists had begun to breed the huge animals on private preserves. Later the Federal Government protected representative herds in parks and on national wildlife refuges. Today, the buffalo is not in any danger of extinction.

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EDITORS: Pictures are available by calling 202/343-8770.